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Horses, cats seized in Rye

Updated report

STRATHAM — Five horses and three cats were removed Sunday from a home whose owner pled guilty seven years ago to a charge of animal cruelty involving some of the same animals.



The N.H. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Rye Police seized the animals following complaints that began about a month ago. The animals are now in protective custody.

The owner's name was not being released at this time. The NHSPCA plans to seek ownership of the animals and says cruelty charges will likely be pursued since this is the owner's second offense.

Abigail Smith of the NHSPCA one horse appeared as though it had "never been outside of the barn." She said it took five hours to coax the animal out of the barn and into a waiting trailer.

The blankets tied around the horses' bodies were so tightly bound with twine that there were sores underneath, she said.

Four of the horses are being held at the NHSPCA's adoption center in Stratham, as are the three cats. The horses are significantly underweight and require substantial care to their feet. One horse requires serious medical attention and is at a local animal hospital. The other animals are eating and appear to be on the road to recovery, Smith said.

One of the cats is feral, another is partially feral and the third is "the biggest sweetheart" and has been nicknamed "Turtle" because of its tortoise shell coloring.

The case is the result of incomplete follow-through after the animal owner's previous conviction, said Steve Sprowl, manager of the NHSPCA's field services division, the unit that handles investigations and rescues.

Sprowl said the owner was first arrested in 1999 and sentenced to two years of probation, not an unusual punishment for a first-time offender.

The owner was supposed to work with a veterinarian to put the animals on a proper diet, allow the animals to get exercise, and install a window to allow natural light in because the horses were being kept in a "dark, dingy, bottom of the barn — a dungeon-type stall," he said.

Shortly after the woman's probation ended in 2002, Sprowl said he stopped in to check on the property. Sprowl said the owner asked him to leave at that time.

"Obviously, the probation department didn't follow up to see if she was following the order of the court," he said Wednesday.

The NHSPCA investigates 500-600 of animal cruelty cases each year and takes approximately 1,200 animals into protective custody, Sprowl said. Most cases involve multiple animals in one home.

"I think people bite off more than they can chew," he said. "They're afraid and embarrassed to ask for assistance."

The SPCA encourages people to surrender their animals if unable to care for them.

"Nobody's going to blame you," he said. "It would be so much better for the animal and the person — then they wouldn't be facing animal cruelty investigations."

The number of animals being put into protective custody has declined in recent years, although complaints are on the rise — something Sprowl attributes to people's increasing awareness of animal cruelty through television programs.

The NHSPCA is seeking up to \$5,000 in financial support to rehabilitate the horses and provide medical treatment. Donations may be made to the SOS Fund via nhspca.org, by phone at (603) 772-2921 or by mail to SOS Fund, PO Box 196, Stratham, NH 03885.

By GRETA CUYLER
Democrat Staff Writer
